

Message Text

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ACTION EA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CCO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 USIE-00 INRE-00

CIAE-00 PM-03 H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01

PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 COME-00 EB-07 LAB-04 SIL-01 AID-05

OMB-01 OC-05 SY-05 OPR-02 SCS-03 SCA-01 CU-02 /086 W
----- 031879

O R 031300Z JUN 75

FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5030

INFO CINCPAC

DIA

COMUSMACTHAI BKK THAI

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BANGKOK 10180

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PINS, ELAB, TH

SUBJ: RENEWED LABOR UNREST AND THE THREAT OF A NATIONWIDE STRIKE

CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

REF : BANGKOK 9932

BEGIN SUMMARY: A WAVE OF LABOR MILITANCY SINCE MAY DAY HAS LED TO A DIRECT CONFRONTATION BETWEEN LABOR, MANAGEMENT, AND THE RTG OVER THE GOVERNMENT'S HANDLING OF LABOR STRIFE. LABOR LEADERS HAS THREATENED A GENERAL STRIKE UNLESS THE GOVERNMENT YIELDS TO THEIR DEMANDS, WHICH INCLUDE THE REMOVAL OF THE POLICE OFFICIAL WHO DIRECTED THE BREAKING OF A PICKET LINE. THE DIRECTOR GENERAL OF POLICE SAYS HE WILL RESIGN IF HIS SUBORDINATE IS FIRED. THUS LABOR LEADERS AND GOVERNMENT SECURITY FORCES ARE IN PUBLIC CONFRONTATION. PRIME MINISTER KHUKRIT AND HIS GOVERNMENT ARE CAUGHT IN THE MIDDLE WITH OBVIOUS STRAINS FOR THE WEAK COALITION GOVERNMENT. A KEY LABOR FIGURE IN THE CALL FOR A GENERAL STRIKE TOLD THE LABOR REPORTING OFFICER THAT HE BELIEVES THE RTG WILL REFUSE LABOR'S DE-
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MANDS AND THAT A GENERAL STRIKE WILL BEGIN JUNE 4. THE

EMBASSY BELIEVES THAT IT IS UNLIKELY LABOR WILL BE ABLE TO MAKE GOOD ON THEIR THREAT TO CALL A GENERAL STRIKE BUT THEY COULD CAUSE REAL PROBLEMS IN SOME SECTORS, SUCH AS ELECTRICITY, RAILROADS, AND SOME BUS AND TRUCKING FIRMS. END SUMMARY.

1. A SURGE OF LABOR ACTIVISM, INCLUDING PROLONGED STRIKES AT THE DUSIT THANI HOTEL AND THE STANDARD GARMENT FACTORY, SINCE MAY 1 (LABOR DAY) HAS CAUSED A NEW CONFRONTATION BETWEEN LABOR ACTIVISTS AND GOVERNMENT AND MANAGEMENT CONSERVATIVES. GOVERNMENT INACTION FORCED BOTH LABORERS AND MANAGEMENT TO RESORT TO EXTRA-LEGAL MEANS, AND HAS PRESENTED THE GOVERNMENT WITH A POTENTIALLY SERIOUS DOMESTIC CRISIS.

2. AFTER A LABOR STRIKE HAD SHUT DOWN THE DUSIT THANI FOR WEEKS, THE MANAGEMENT ANNOUNCED THE INDEFINITE CLOSURE OF THE HOTEL MAY 26 AND HIRED A RIGHT-WING VOCATIONAL STUDENT GROUP, KNOWN AS THE RED GUARD TO PROTECT HOTEL PROPERTY AGAINST STRIKING WORKERS. AT THE STANDARD GARMENT FACTORY STRIKING WORKERS FORMED A PICKET LINE TO PREVENT THE MAJORITY OF WORKERS, WHO WANTED TO RETURN TO WORK, FROM DOING SO. RIOT CONTROL POLICE USED CLUBS TO BREAK UP THE PICKET LINE MAY 28, INJURING ABOUT FIFTEEN STRIKING FEMALE WORKERS.

3. LEADERS OF A LOOSE FEDERATION OF 65 LABOR UNIONS HAVE DEMANDED THE DISMISSAL OF POLICE COLONEL YUTTHANA WANNAKOWIT, THE POLICE OFFICER WHO HAS TAKEN THE RAP FOR THE DECISION--WHICH HIGHER AUTHORITIES PROBABLY MADE--TO DISPERSE THE STANDARD GARMENT PICKETERS. THEY HAVE ALSO DEMANDED THE REMOVAL OF THE RED GUARDS FROM THE DUSIT THANI. THEY HAVE GIVEN THE GOVERNMENT A DEADLINE OF NOON, JUNE 4, TO MEET THESE DEMANDS, AND HAVE ASKED LABORERS FROM SURROUNDING PROVINCES TO JOIN A RALLY IN BANGKOK JUNE 4. IF THE GOVERNMENT FAILS TO ANSWER THEIR DEMANDS SATISFACTORILY, THE LABOR ACTIVISTS HAVE THREATENED TO CALL A NATIONWIDE STRIKE IN TWO STAGES. THE FIRST STAGE WOULD INVOLVE ONLY INDUSTRIAL WORKERS. IF THAT FAILED TO ACHIEVE UNION DEMANDS, THE SECOND STAGE WOULD INCLUDE WORKERS IN STATE-OWNED UTILITIES AS WELL. EVEN IF ALL ORGANIZED WORKERS JOINED THE GENERAL STRIKE, LABOR UNIONS EXIST IN A RELATIVELY CONFIDENTIAL

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SMALL PERCENTAGE OF THAI ENTERPRISES.

4. PRIME MINISTER KHUKRIT PRAMOT IS DUE TO APPEAR ON TELEVISION ON THE EVENING OF JUNE 3 TO ANNOUNCE HIS PLANS FOR COPING WITH THE CURRENT LABOR UNREST. MEANWHILE INTERIOR MINISTER BUNTHENG THONGSAWAT ANNOUNCED THE FORMATION OF A THREE-MAN COMMITTEE TO INVESTIGATE THE FACTS OF THE POLICE ACTION AT THE STANDARD GARMENT FACTORY, BUT NOT TO ASSIGN GUILT.

5. MILITARY AND POLICE CONSERVATIVES ARE ADOPTING A TOUVH STANCE ON THE LABOR SITUATION. POLICE DIRECTOR GENERAL PHOT PHEKANAN SAID JUNE 2 THAT HE WILL RESIGN IF THE GOVERNMENT AGREES TO THE WORKERS' DEMAND FOR YUTTHANA'S DISMISSAL. ROYAL THAI ARMY COMMANDER KRIT SIWARA TOLD REPORTERS JUNE 2 THAT HE HAS URGED KHUKRIT TO GET TOUGH ON LABOR UNREST, WHICH HE SAID RESULTED FROM POLITICAL RATHER THAN ECONOMIC MOTIVES. AIR VICE MARSHAL SOMPHON BURUTRATANAPHAN, DIRECTOR OF AIR FORCE INTELLIGENCE TOLD THE ASSISTANT AIR ATTACHE MAY 28 THAT HE HAD SUGGESTED THE USE OF THE REG GAUR TO DUSIT THANI HOTEL CHAIRMAN, MRS. CHANAT PIYAOU, MAY 27. SOMPHON ALSO ACCUSED KHUKRIT OF NOT WANTING TO SOLVE THE DUSIT THANI STRIKE BECAUSE HE HAS A FINANCIAL INTEREST IN THE RIVAL INDRA REGENT HOTEL. ACCORDING TO DAO, MILITARY LEADERS ARE REVIEWING THEIR PLANS TO ASSIST POLICE IN MAINTAINING LAW AND ORDER IN THE EVENT OF A GENERAL STRIKE.

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OMB-01 OC-05 SY-05 OPR-02 SCS-03 SCA-01 CU-02 /086 W

----- 031954

O R 031300Z JUN 75

FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5031

INFO CINCPAC

DIA

COMUSMACTHAI BKK THAI

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 BANGKOK 10180

CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

6. THOETPHUM CHAIDI, A KEY FIGURE BEHIND THE THREAT OF

A GENERAL STRIKE, TOLD THE LABOR REPORTING OFFICER (LRO) THAT HE FEELS THE RTG WILL REFUSE LABOR'S DEMANDS AND THAT A GENERAL STRIKE WILL BEGIN JUNE 4. THOETPHUM CLAIMED THAT THE GENERAL STRIKE HAS BEEN ORGANIZED TO OCCUR IN STEPS, I.E., WITH CERTAIN WORKERS GOING OFF FIRST ONLY TO BE JOINED AT A LATER DATE BY OTHER WORKERS SUPPORTING THE GENERAL STRIKE. IN THIS CONNECTION HE TOLD THE LRO THAT THE MOST NECESSARY SERVICES FOR THE CITY, SUCH AS WATER AND ELECTRICITY, WOULD BE AMONG THE LAST TO JOIN THE STEP-BY-STEP GENERAL STRIKE. THOETPHUM SPECIFICALLY EXPRESSED NO CONFIDENCE THAT THE PRIME MINISTER'S SCHEDULED ADDRESS TO THE NATION THE EVENING OF JUNE 3 WOULD YIELD A SOLUTION TO THE DISPUTE, AND CLAIMED WITH A MISCHIEVOUS SMILE IN HIS EYE THAT HE AND OTHER LABORERS WERE PREPARED TO FIGHT TO THE DEATH IN THEIR DISPUTE WITH THE GOVERNMENT. HE ALSO SAID THAT GOVERNMENT AND THE PRIVILEGED CLASSES IN THAILAND, WHO FIND THEMSELVES ALLIED AGAINST THE WORKERS IN THIS DISPUTE, CONFIDENTIAL

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MUST YIELD OR THAILAND WOULD SUFFER A CIVIL WAR.

7. COMMENT: THE CURRENT CONFRONTATION BETWEEN LABOR ACTIVISTS AND CONSERVATIVES IS THE LATEST IN A LONG SERIES OF SOCIAL CONFLICTS SINCE THE COLLAPSE OF MILITARY RULE IN OCTOBER 1973. THE GOVERNMENT'S FAILURE TO RESOLVE THE STRIKES AT AN EARLY STAGE HAS BROUGHT ABOUT A POTENTIALLY SERIOUS CRISIS. IF LABOR LEADERS SUCCESSFULLY CARRY OUT THEIR THREAT TO CALL A GENERAL STRIKE, THEY COULD PARALYZE BANGKOK AND UNDERMINE THE STABILITY OF THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT. GIVEN THE RUDIMENTARY STATE OF LABOR ORGANIZATION IN THAILAND, THE RELATIVELY FEW WELL ORGANIZED UNIONS, AND THE TENUOUS CONNECTION BETWEEN SUPPOSED LABOR LEADERS AND THEIR RANK AND FILE MEMBERS, IT SEEMS UNLIKELY THAT THE LABORERS' THREAT TO CALL A GENERAL STRIKE WILL BE SUCCESSFUL. NEVERTHELESS, THE FAR LEFT FRINGE OF LABOR LEADERS, LONG THE PARIAH OF THE MORE CONSERVATIVE MAJORITY, HAS NOW GAINED CONTROL OF THE MAJORITY OF LABOR LEADERS AND STEERED LABOR ON A COLLISION COURSE WITH THE GOVERNMENT OVER A HIGHLY EMOTIONAL ISSUE. IN THE PAST, HOWEVER, SOCIAL ACTIVISTS AND CONSERVATIVES HAVE BEEN ABLE TO ACHIEVE COMPROMISE SOLUTIONS AFTER CARRYING SUCH CONFRONTATIONS JUST SHORT OF THE BRINK.

8. ON A HAPPIER NOTE, THE PROTRACTED STRIKE AT THE FIRESTONE TYRE CO. (REFTEL) WAS SETTLED THIS MORNING, DUE IN LARGE PART TO THE CRUCIAL INTERVENING ROLE OF THE LRO. WHITEHOUSE

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: POLITICAL STABILITY, LABOR DISPUTES, LABOR STRIKES, NEGOTIATIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 03 JUN 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GolinoFR
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975BANGKO10180
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750193-0742
From: BANGKOK
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750683/aaaacyay.tel
Line Count: 222
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 5
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 75 BANGKOK 9932
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GolinoFR
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 23 JUL 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <23 JUL 2003 by CunninFX>; APPROVED <24 JUL 2003 by GolinoFR>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
06 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: RENEWED LABOR UNREST AND THE THREAT OF A NATIONWIDE STRIKE CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD
TAGS: PINT, PINS, ELAB, TH, (KHUKRIT PRAMOT)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 06 JUL 2006